



# 50 EVENTS THAT CHANGED BLACK AMERICA

## REFERENCE

**Directorate of Research, Defense Equal  
Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI)  
Heritage Series Pamphlet**

# 50 EVENTS THAT CHANGED BLACK AMERICA



## 1. MARCH 7, 1942

**First Black cadets graduate from flying school at Tuskegee, Alabama. In June 1943, the first squadron of Black aviators, the 99th Pursuit Squadron, flew its first combat mission, strafing enemy positions on the Italian island of Pantelleria.**

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## **2. NOVEMBER 1, 1942**

John H. Johnson, editor of Supreme Life Insurance Company newsletter, organizes Johnson Publishing Company and publishes first issue of "Negro Digest".

## **3. NOVEMBER 3, 1942**

William L. Dawson is elected to Congress from Chicago. On August 1, 1944, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., of Harlem became the first Black Congressman from the East.

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## 4. APRIL 3, 1944

The Supreme Court rules in *Smith v. Allwright* that “White primaries” could not exclude Black voters.

## 5. APRIL 24, 1944

The United Negro College Fund is incorporated.



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## **6. APRIL 25, 1945**

The United Nations is founded at San Francisco meeting attended by Black American consultants, including W.E.B. DuBois, Mary McLeod Bethune, Ralph J. Bunche, and Walter White.

## **7. MAY 8, 1945**

Germany surrenders on V-E Day, Japan surrendered on September 2, V-J Day, ending World War II. A total of 1,154,720 Blacks were inducted into the Armed Services. Many returned to America and attended college with GI Bill of Rights benefits.

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## 8. OCTOBER 23, 1945

Brooklyn Dodgers sign Jackie Robinson and send him to their Montreal farm team. On April 15, 1947, Robinson made his debut at Ebbetts Field and became the first Black in the Major Leagues in modern times.

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## **9. NOVEMBER 1, 1945**

Founding of “Ebony” magazine marks the beginning of a new era in Black-oriented journalism.

## **10. MARCH 21, 1946**

Kenny Washington signs with the Los Angeles Rams and becomes the first Black player in professional football in 13 years. Three other Blacks: Woody Strode of the Rams; Ben Willis and Marion Motley of the Cleveland Browns -- signed in the same year.

## **11. JUNE 3, 1946**

U.S. Supreme Court (Irene Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia) bans segregation in interstate bus travel



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## 12. DECEMBER 5, 1946

President Harry S. Truman creates the landmark Committee on Civil Rights. In October 1947, the committee issued a formal report, "To Secure These Rights," which condemned racism in America.

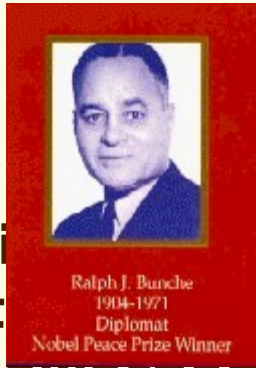


## 13. JULY 26, 1948

In response to widespread Black protests and a threat of civil disobedience, President Truman issues two executive orders ending racial discrimination in federal employment and requiring equal treatment in the Armed Services.



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as  
mediator  
September 2,  
was awarded the  
prize for his successful mediation of the Israeli-  
Palestine conflict. He was the first Black to win  
a Nobel Prize.

## 14. September 18, 1948

Ralph J. Bunche is confirmed  
acting United Nations  
in Palestine. On  
1950, Bunche  
Nobel Peace

## 15. NOVEMBER 1, 1951

Publication of first issue of "Jet" magazine  
by Johnson Publishing Company marks the  
beginning of a new era of weekly news coverage  
in Black America.

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**16. MAY 17, 1954**

In a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court outlaws segregation in the public school system. Landmark Brown v. Board of Education Topeka decision sounded death knell for legal segregation in the United States.

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Chuck Berry

**17. MAY 10, 1955**

**Chuck Berry records “Rock and Roll” which played major development and other Black stars, notably Muddy Waters and Little Richard, were the major musical influences on the Beatles and other White groups.**

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begin  
Alab  
sparked the

she refused (December 1) to give her bus seat to a  
White man. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was  
elected president of the boycott organization.

## 18. DECEMBER 5, 1955

Historic bus boycott  
in Montgomery,  
Rosa Parks  
boycott when

## 19. MARCH 6, 1957

Independence celebration of Ghana marks  
the beginning of the end for colonial rule in Africa.

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## 20. AUGUST 29, 1957

U.S. Congress passes Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first federal civil rights legislation since 1875.



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integration.

## 21. SEPTEMBER 25, 1957

Nine Little Rock, Arkansas, schoolchildren are escorted to Central High School by federal troops, ending efforts to thwart court-ordered

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## 22. DECEMBER 17, 1959

The founding of Motown Records help change the understanding, marketing, and promotion of Black popular music.



store.

## 23. FEBRUARY 1, 1960

Four North Carolina A&T students begin the Sit-in Movement at the counter of a

North  
dime



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## 24. MAY 4, 1961

Thirteen “Freedom Riders” begin bus trip through the South to test compliance with laws banning segregation in interstate transportation. Black and White riders were bombed and savagely beaten, but their movement ended segregation in interstate transportation facilities.



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## 25. OCTOBER 1, 1962

Escorted by 12,000 federal troops, James Meredith enters the University of Mississippi, ending the state's defiance of federal law.

## 26. JUNE 12, 1963

Medgar Evers, NAACP field secretary in Mississippi, is assassinated in front of his home.

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## **27. AUGUST 28, 1963**

25,000 people participate in the March on Washington, the biggest civil rights demonstration ever. This is where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his famous speech "I Have a Dream".

## **28. SEPTEMBER 15, 1963**

Four Black girls are killed in the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.

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## 29. JULY 2, 1964

Civil Rights Bill, with public accommodations and fair employment sections, is signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson.



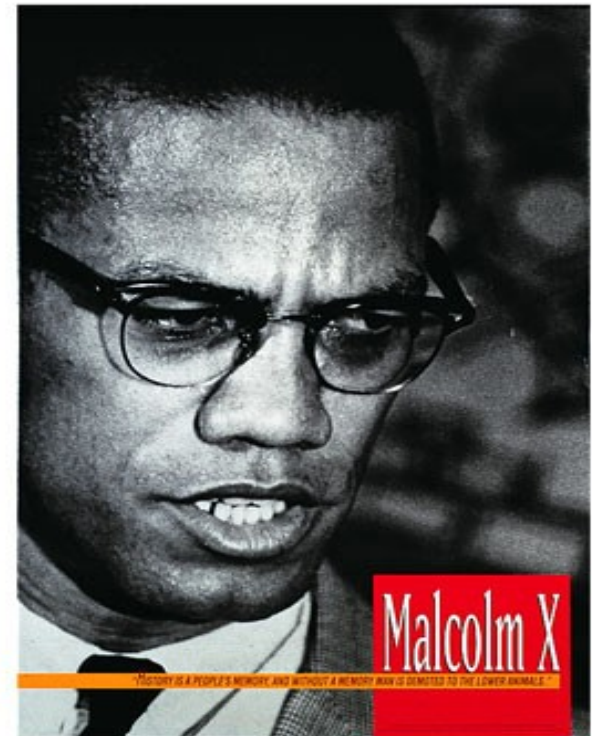
## 30. AUGUST 20, 1964

President Johnson signs Economic Opportunity Act, initiating the “war on poverty.”

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## 31. FEBRUARY 21, 1965

Malcolm X, charismatic Black nationalist leader, is assassinated at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem. Three Blacks were later convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment.



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## **32. MARCH 21, 1965**

Thousands of marchers, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and protected by federal troops, complete the first leg of the Selma-to Montgomery march.

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## **33. AUGUST 6, 1965**

President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Bill which authorized the suspension of literacy tests. Federal examiners were sent to the South under provisions of the bill.

## **34. AUGUST 11, 1965**

An insurrection starts in the Watts section of Los Angeles and rages for six days. The Watts insurrection was the first in a wave of major disturbances that forced a national reappraisal of racism in America.

## **35. JANUARY 18, 1966**

Robert Weaver is sworn in as secretary of housing and urban development and becomes the first Black member of a presidential cabinet.



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## **36. OCTOBER 2, 1967**

Thurgood Marshall becomes the first Black member of the U.S. Supreme

## **37. NOVEMBER 7, 1967**

Carl Stokes of Cleveland, Ohio and Richard Hatcher of Gary, Indiana become the first Blacks elected mayors of major U.S. cities.

## **38. FEBRUARY 29, 1968**

The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the Kerner Commission) says in formal report that White racism is the root cause of the riots in American cities.



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## **39. APRIL 4, 1968**

**Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated by a White sniper in Memphis. The assassination triggered a national crisis with rioting in more than 100 cities and calls for racial renewal and repentance. President Johnson declared a day of mourning.**

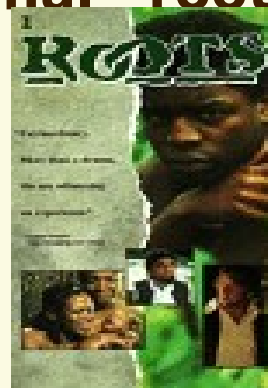
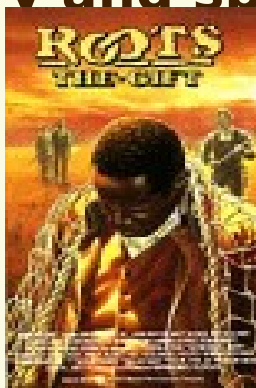
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## 40. APRIL 10, 1968

U.S. Congress passes Civil Rights Bill banning racial discrimination in the housing market and making it a crime to interfere with civil rights workers.

## 41. JANUARY 23-30, 1977

The ABC-TV dramatization of Alex Haley's *Roots* becomes the highest-rated drama in TV history and sparks a national "roots" craze.



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## **42. NOVEMBER 2, 1983**

President Ronald Reagan signs a bill designating the third Monday in January of each year as a federal holiday in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Millions celebrated the first holiday on January 20, 1986.

## **43. NOVEMBER 3, 1983**

The Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, president of Operation PUSH, announces that he will run for U.S. President. His campaign generated unprecedented fervor.



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## 44. SEPTEMBER 20, 1984

The Cosby Show premieres on NBC-TV and changes the image of African-American and the viewing habits of White Americans.



## 45. SEPTEMBER 21, 1989

General Colin L. Powell is confirmed by the Senate as the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was the highest ranking African-American officer in the U.S. History.

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## **46. NOVEMBER 7, 1989**

**L. Douglas Wilder of Virginia becomes the first Black elected governor.**

## **47. JANUARY 24, 1991**

**The spreading AIDS epidemic is called a major health threat to African-Americans by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. Officials said the disease, which forced a major re-evaluation of sexual relationships, was the leading cause of death among African-American women 15 to 44 years old in New York State and new Jersey. African-American leaders cited the danger to addicts infected needles and called for safe sex practices.**

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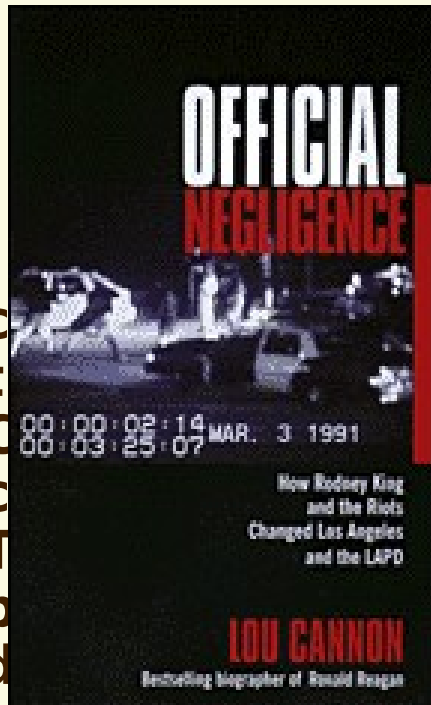
## **48. MARCH 3, 1991**

Videotaped beating of motorist Rodney G. King by White Los Angeles police officers sparks an international uproar. Four White officers were indicted on March 14.

## **49. JUNE 27, 1991**

Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall announces his retirement and decries the increasingly conservative direction of the Court. On July 1, President Bush nominated Clarence Thomas, a conservative Black on the U.S. District of Columbia Court of Appeals to fill the vacant seat. He was confirmed by a narrow 52 to 48 margin after Attorney Anita Hill, accused him of sexual harassment.

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## 50. APRIL 29, 1992

Acquittal of four white police officers in the Rodney King sparks biggest U.S. riot since urban explosions during the War. Federal troops were out to quell rebellion. Coroner's Office said 58 died during the